Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

October 2020

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Examiners' Report – 9RU0/02
Autumn 2020

Purpose of the paper

This paper is designed to test candidates' ability to write accurately in Russian, structure their responses and demonstrate their knowledge of the target-language culture and / or society through the study and critical and analytical response to two literary texts or a literary text and a film.
This was a special series put in place to replace the cancelled summer series of examinations, and therefore the number of entries was relatively small and consisted mainly of heritage / native speaker candidates. Nevertheless, some candidates had been well prepared, clearly having referenced the specification and sample materials, and studied their chosen texts or films in detail. There were some examples of candidates who knew how to translate accurately from English and how to write a structured essay which makes critical and analytical points about the chosen works.

Unfortunately, as in the Summer 2019 series, there were also some examples of candidates who had clearly not been prepared, and who simply retold the story of their chosen work or were not able to offer any coherent essay. Examiners would wish to remind centres that it is not possible for a candidate to be entered for this examination without having studied two of the texts from the specification in detail. Simply having read the texts or seen the films is not enough for candidates to perform well.

Structure of the examination

The paper requires candidates to complete a translation into Russian and then write two essays. Their essays must either be on two literary texts or on one literary text and one film. The two texts or text and film offered for examination must be from the list set out on page 51 of the specification.
The translation (section A) is worth 20 of the available 120 marks, and the two essays (section B for texts and section C for films) are worth the remaining 100 marks, with 50 marks for each essay. The essay marks consist of 20 marks for Critical and Analytical Response (AO4), 20 marks for Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary (AO3) and 10 marks for Accuracy (AO3).

The time allowed for the examination is two hours and 40 minutes. An appropriate division of time would be for candidates to spend about 30 minutes on the translation and about an hour on each of the essays, including spending time planning their response carefully.

Advice to centres

There is no penalty applied for essays that are overlong, although teachers and candidates are encouraged to produce essays that fall within the suggested 250-word limit for A Level. Part of the skill at this level is to marshal material appropriately and be selective about what to include and what not to include. Quotations from texts or films are not counted as part of any word count.

Centres are advised to ensure that they choose works for examination carefully. Candidates should be well prepared for both their chosen works. This includes studying features such as characterisation, the form and the technique of presentation, key concepts and issues, and the social and cultural context, as appropriate to the work studied. Candidates must have a critical and analytical appreciation of the works. This means they must be able to offer points of view and support them with evidence from the text or film. Knowing the plot and retelling it will not score highly, and neither will irrelevant information or points of view offered without evidence.

Based on their performance in this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Ensure that you prepare thoroughly for the translation task by studying the prescribed grammar list on page 52 of the specification;

- Divide your time carefully and do not spend too much time on the translation task;

- Check that you have not omitted any word from the translation task;

- Learn your grammatical endings carefully, focusing particularly on the cases required after prepositions and some common verbs;

- Ensure you know a range of essay phrases that will help you to write a critical response to the work you have studied;

- Ensure that you have a range of words and structures that are considered terminology appropriate for literary or cinematic analysis, such as 'plot', 'metaphor', 'first person narrative', 'the reader is given the impression that' or 'the audience can see that'.

- Seek to use more complex grammatical structures in your essay, such as passives, conditionals, relative pronouns in cases other than the nominative, extended sentences to express abstract ideas (e.g. sentences requiring conjunctions and pronouns), synonyms for more common vocabulary, correct use of verbal aspects, correct use of verbs of motion, use of the subjunctive with verbs of commanding, etc.;

- Ensure that you know your text or film well and have a good range of quotations to back up your points, and ensure you do not make points without reference to the text;

- Plan your essay carefully, thinking about what your conclusion will be and ensuring that your points lead up to it – decide what you want to say before you say it;

- Use a 'Point, Evidence, Explain, Link' approach to writing your essay, ensuring that you make a critical point and then back it up using evidence, explain your point in more depth and then link it to your overall argument;

- Write your essay in paragraphs so that the examiner can follow your points;

- Keep to the suggested word limit and select your material carefully;

- Ensure that your handwriting is legible.

The examining team would like to take this opportunity to thank those teachers of Russian who present excellent candidates, many taking careful note of the advice from last year's report.

Section A: Translation

Section A of this paper required candidates to translate a short passage of English into Russian. The passage will always be based on one of the sub-themes from Theme 1, 2, 3 or 4 from pages 8-9 of the specification. The translation is split into 20 'assessable elements' (see the markscheme) and one mark is awarded for each correct element. For an element to be considered correct, it must have all the details contained in the English original (i.e. no word omitted) and the grammatical endings must all be completely correct (including noun, verb and adjective endings). Spelling errors are tolerated, provided they are not part of the grammatical ending.

Overall, the majority of candidates performed well in this task. As they had studied the topic of the translation, they knew the relevant vocabulary and were able to deploy their knowledge of grammar. The small number of learner candidates were usually able to score around 8-12 marks out of 20, although the number of learner candidates scoring above this remains low. Some native speaker candidates lost marks due to omission of parts of elements (e.g. 'however' in element 11 or 'State' in element 18). Native speakers also sometimes failed to offer correct specialist vocabulary, such as not knowing the word for 'to tour' (element 17). Those with little ability to manipulate the grammar of the language scored very low marks in this task, even when they knew every word of the required vocabulary. Some candidates scored only 1 or 2 marks for this reason, although they had translated every word of the English.

Candidates faced the most difficulty with the following elements:

- 'The circus has always played an important role' caused some problems where the gender of 'роль' was not known, and so candidates did not put 'важный' into the correct form. Very many candidates also misspelled 'circus' as 'цырк'.

- 'Before 1917' caused problems for some candidates, although centres are reminded that candidates can score the mark for writing 'До 1917' or 'До 1917 г.' and therefore avoiding ending pitfalls.

- 'successful private circuses on the country' often let to the use of 'приватный' for 'private'. This was allowed, but it was surprising that

many candidates did not know 'частный'. 'In Russia' was an acceptable translation for 'in the country'.

- Many candidates did not seem to know 'государство' for state; 'штат' was quite common, but not acceptable. 'Under its control' caused a few difficulties.

- 'One result of this was that' was mistranslated reasonably frequently. Candidates mixed up where they did and did not need instrumental cases, or were not able to use 'то, что' correctly.

- The government earned' prompted a few acceptable alternatives, as long as the meaning of 'earned' was conveyed and the verb ending was correct. Some candidates did not know the word for 'performance' in the element 'all the money from performances', although various options were allowed, such as 'спектакль'.

- 'Of course, however, we must not forget' often caused candidates to omit either 'of course' or 'however', thus losing the mark.

- Some candidates omitted 'also' from 'that circuses were also supported'. There was an opportunity for a passive participle for 'supported', but as always, the reflexive verb or 3rd person plural passive construction were accepted.

- Some candidates omitted чтобы before 'to develop' but this did not lose the point if 'to develop' had the correct infinitive reflexive ending with the soft sign. A few candidates used the noun correctly as in 'for development' and this was acceptable.

- 'Not only as popular entertainment' provoked a few correct alternatives but the sense of 'не только как' and 'но и как' in the following phrase were essential in order to gain both marks at the end of this paragraph.

- 'to tour abroad regularly' presented a number of difficulties in the translation of 'to tour', with 'делать тур' an occasional translation. Many incorrect answers failed to put the verb in the infinitive or did not convey the idea of touring rather than just 'going'. 'За границу' was acceptable for 'abroad' with the appropriate verb of motion and 'на гастроли'.

- Very many native speaker candidates omitted 'State' from the translation of 'The Moscow State Circus became very famous', or did not translate it using an adjective. Others translated 'famous' as

'популярный' which was not allowed, or did not use the instrumental after 'стал'.

- 'and people everywhere still respect' sometimes caused problems because candidates did not know how to translate 'still' correctly.

Sections B and C: Written Response to Works or Films

In section B or C candidates were required to write an essay on two of the texts or one text and one films that they have studied. They had to present a critical and analytical response to access the highest mark bands.

Critical and Analytical Response (AO4)

A critical and analytical response is defined in the specification as selecting relevant material from the works, presenting and justifying points of view, developing arguments, drawing conclusions based on understanding, and evaluating issues, themes and cultural and social contexts related to the works studied. In order to access the highest mark bands (9-12, 13-16 and 17-20) for 'Critical and Analytical Response' (AO4), essays must partly or wholly address this requirement for a critical and analytical response.

Accordingly, essays that simply re-presented the story from the text or film scored very low marks, usually in the 5-8 mark band unless there are some elements of critical or analytical response, where they may be placed on the 9-12 mark band. A critical and analytical response always involves the candidate using the essay to make points about the question being asked and using evidence to back up these points. Many non-taught candidates did not reach the top half of the 13-16 mark band because they had not considered how to structure their essay coherently, or planned its content before starting.

Essays that scored the highest marks (17-20) in the 'Critical and Analytical Response' (AO4) mark grid were relevant, succinct, carefully planned and focused on giving a critical response throughout. Examples (usually in the form of targeted quotations or short descriptions of events or actions) were used consistently to back up the points being made, and the points were linked to an overall argument. Structure was fully coherent and the examiner could follow the sophisticated points being made throughout. In most cases, every paragraph took a 'point-evidence-explain-link' approach, with links being made to the wider thread of the essay and leading to the overall conclusion. There was no retelling of the story or lack of focus on the specific question being asked. There was invariably a very detailed knowledge of the text amongst those candidates scoring the highest marks for AO4.

Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary (AO3)

Essays that scored the highest marks (17-20) in the 'Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary' (AO3) mark grid had a range of complex structures, such as passives, conditionals, relative pronouns in cases other than the nominative, extended sentences to express abstract ideas (e.g. sentences requiring conjunctions and pronouns), synonyms for more common vocabulary, correct use of verbal aspects, correct use of verbs of motion, use of the subjunctive with verbs of commanding, etc.

The highest scoring essays also contained regular use of terminology and structures appropriate for literary and cinematic analysis, with a good command of specialist vocabulary such as 'director', 'character', 'plot', and also frequent structures allowing for appropriate critical and analytical response (such as 'the reader can see that...', 'from this it can be concluded that...' or 'this quotation shows that...'). Learner candidates often scored in the 13-16 band due to their ability to use essay phrases and specialist literary vocabulary. Weaker non-learner candidates often scored in the 13-16 mark band because the register of their essay was not appropriate, even though their language was completely accurate and they made relevant points. Addition of literary terms and more formal essay structures would have enabled these candidates to access the 17-20 mark band for 'Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary'.

'Accuracy of Language' (AO3)

For 'Accuracy of Language' (AO3), most native speaker candidates scored 10. To score the highest marks, writing does not have to be error free, but the general impression does have to be of accurate language with errors likely to be in more unusual or irregular forms. Learner candidates whose communication was clear and where the reader can always understand what is being said, even if not entirely accurate, can score in the 7-8 band. For the highest band, 9-10, learner candidates had to demonstrate that they were able to apply their knowledge of case and verb endings consistently, with errors not occurring from a lack of understanding but instead from lack of knowledge of a more complex situations or from how to apply their understanding in a particular context. The overall impression is of a candidate who has been taught their grammar and knows it well.

Popularity of Questions

Around 65% of candidates answered on one text and one film, and the remaining 35% answered on two texts.

Nearly 60% of candidates chose *Пиковая дама* as their literary text, including the majority of learner candidates entered for the examination. These candidates invariably then chose *Утомлённые солнцем* as their other work. The works are given below in order of popularity, although the number of answers for some of the works was very low:

> *Пиковая дама*
> *Утомлённые солнцем*
> *Ревизор*

Вишнёвый сад
Левиафан
Кавказский пленник
Неделя как неделя
Крылья
Сонечка
Один день Ивана Денисовича

There are individual comments set out below on the different texts and films where there were sufficient answers to make this relevant.

Question 2 - *Пиковая дама* (Pushkin)

Question 2(a) was the most popular essay choice for this text. There were many excellent answers which were able to assess the success of Pushkin's portrayal of Germann's madness. The highest marks for Critical and Analytical Response went to those who displayed a close knowledge of the text and backed up their points with appropriate quotations or evidence in a clear, logical structure. The best essays focused on the different stages of Germann's descent into insanity, picking out quotes which illustrated how Pushkin leads us to draw conclusions about the character's state of mind. This was usually done chronologically through the text, but occasionally candidates took other approaches which worked well. It was also particularly impressive when candidates were able to weigh up why some might consider Pushkin's portrayal of Germann's madness as unrealistic or unbelievable, and come to a conclusion about the extent to which the portrayal is successful given the evidence, as required by the question. The very best answers argued that the magical elements detract from the realistic portrayal of Germann's mental decline but showed that the reader is seeing the action from his eyes and are thus drawn into his nightmare world. Good essays always had a strong conclusion that brought the strands of their argument together and made a clear judgement about Pushkin's success as a writer in portraying madness, whether this was successful or not. The least successful essays simply retold the story of Germann's desire to learn the secret of the three cards, and how he sets about finding it out, with no critical or analytical content, and often no introduction or conclusion. They usually described Germann's progression into madness without any evaluation of the writer's success. This retelling often led to marks in the lowest mark bands.

Question 2(b) was much less popular than 2(a). Most candidates were able to reflect on how important the countess is in the story, but they were not always able to draw comparisons with other characters and their relative importance. The strongest candidates were able to make a judgement about whether the Countess is the most important character in the work, identified her with the title and compared her role to those of Germann, Tomsky or Lizaveta and they concluded with direct referrals to the specific words in the question. Answers to this question often provided examples of something which is reasonably common with these types of examination questions, but nearly always leads to lower marks: nearly all candidates simply agreed that the countess is the most important character and then presented evidence to support this, rather than discussing why this might be or not be the case, presenting evidence, and then coming to a conclusion at the end. Candidates

are encouraged to be discursive in their answer, rather than simply agreeing with the question. Simple language without any essay phrases or complex grammatical structures did not achieve top marks for Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary. Candidates need to refer to the question throughout their essays, write in an analytical manner and draw their points to an argued conclusion in order to score in the highest mark bands.

Question 3 – *Ревизор* (Gogol)

There were a small number of answers to question 3(a) on Gogol's *Ревизор.* It was interesting to read some excellent discussions of the extent to which the play can or cannot be considered a comedy. The best answers mentioned the farcical elements, cases of mistaken identity and satirical social commentary, and weighed this up with the serious message that Gogol said himself he was trying to get across. Where answers were least successful, they made only infrequent reference to the actual text, and did not use quotes or evidence.

Question 3(b) was a popular choice amongst the small number of candidates who chose this play. Some answers set out very clearly several scenes where we learn about Khlestakov's character, using evidence to tell us what we learn. Some were able to weigh up how much we learn about the character from the different things that he says and does at various points in the play.

Question 4 - *Вишнёвый сад* (Chekhov)

Nearly all candidates who chose this play answered question 4(a). There were some excellent answers that were able to place the events of the play in their social and historical context, and weigh up the extent to which social change can be considered the main theme. The best responses considered how the Emancipation of the Serfs is depicted and how it affects the lives of all the characters, using carefully chosen quotations to illustrate the points made. Less successful answers discussed the social changes but did not reference specific events or characters in the play.

There were very few answers to question 4(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 5 – *Один день Ивана Денисовича* (Solzhenitsyn)

There were very few answers to either question 5(a) or 5(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 6 - *Неделя как неделя* (Baranskaya)

There were very few answers to either question 6(a) or 6(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 7 - *Сонечка* (Ulitskaya)

There were very few answers to either question 7(a) or 7(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 8 – *Крылья* (Shepitko)

There were very few answers to either question 8(a) or 8(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 9 – *Утомлённые солнцем* (Mikhalkov)

Question 9(a) was slightly more popular that 9(b) amongst those candidates who chose to answer on this film and there were some outstanding answers. The best essays focused on the character of Mitya and the reasons he could be considered to be the most important character in film. They argued that Mitya is the catalyst for the unfolding tragedy and compared his role to Kotov's who might also be seen as the chief protagonist. They discussed key scenes such as the playing of Russian roulette at the start in his Moscow flat and agreement to carry out the mission, his arrival in disguise at the dacha, his reception by Marusia and her family, the significance of his fairy tale told to Nadya, and the eventual arrest of Kotov and his own suicide. Successful answers usually pointed to the 'love triangle' relationship with Kotov and Marusia, and used this as evidence (with quotations or detailed information about scenes) to explain how he the most important character due to his relationship with each of the other main characters. Some essays included direct quotations from the film, such as when Mitya tells Kotov how he took everything from him, his family, his love, his mother country, and were able to say that in this situation, Kotov is representative of the Revolution and the Soviet State and its impact on Mitya. Some perceptive responses showed how Mitya belongs to the same social class as Marusia's musical upper-class family, playing the piano, singing, and speaking French in a way that Kotov does not.

Sometimes candidates came to the conclusion that a different character was more important, and where evidence from the film was presented for this, essays could be equally as successful. As always, weaker essays contained less critical or analytical content, or simply began 'I agree that Mitya is the most important character' and then retold the story of his time at Kotov's dacha. In order to gain the best marks for Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary, language appropriate for film criticism needed to be used. Comparisons were evaluated in a logical structure in clear, separate paragraphs and a conclusion drawn. A lack of paragraphing was usually a clear marker of a lack of logical structure.

In question 9(b) the best essays described several carefully chosen scenes which demonstrate to the audience how Soviet power affected people, and weighed up how effectively this is done by Mikhalkov in the film, e.g. the tanks and war planes arriving to exercise in the collective farm's fields, the marching singing Pioneers (whom Nadya longs to join), the ridiculous chemical warfare practice at the riverside, Kotov's speech to his daughter in the boat about the benefits of a beautiful Soviet future in stark contrast to the menace of the

lightning spheres, or the huge red poster of Stalin rising above the fields near the end as the lost lorry driver is shot. The best essays showed showed that the very destruction of Kotov, a hero of the Revolution and 'friend' of Stalin, and his family (made clear before the end credits) as well as Mitya's suicide depict the all-powerful murderous nature of Soviet power towards its own people in the 1930s. Some candidates had clearly researched this period of Soviet history and gave estimated numbers of the millions killed or imprisoned to support their points. Good candidates recognised that the symbolism and depiction of Soviet power in Mikhalkov's film is not subtle, from the ominous phone call in Mitya's flat in view of the Kremlin to the arrival of the big black car at the dacha, but were able to discuss the value of their chosen scenes as a means of historical documentary. Less successful essays perhaps only mentioned one or two scenes and did not consider the different aspects of Soviet power as depicted in the film.

Question 10 – *Кавказский пленник* (Bodrov)

There were a very small number of answers to question 10(a). Candidates were able to discuss the relationship between Sasha and Vanya and provide a good range of specific evidence to back up their points, including quotations from the film.

There were very few answers to question 10(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 11 – *Левиафан* (Zvyagintsev)

There were a very small number of answers to question 11(a). Candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of the detail of the events in the film and how they are used to depict the corruption in provincial Russia. The best essays had clear introductions and conclusions which made reference to the specific question from the exam paper.

There were very few answers to question 11(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.